

Pacific Heads of Health Meeting

Réunion des directeurs de la santé du Pacifique

“Scaling up actions on the Pacific Non-Communicable Diseases Roadmap: Progress, challenges, and way forward”

Summary

Recognising the disproportionate burden of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), the Pacific leaders endorsed the Pacific NCD Roadmap and Pacific Monitoring Alliance for NCD Action (MANA) Dashboard has been used to monitor the progress. Some progress is being seen to tackle NCDs particularly in some areas of strengthening preventive policies. To further scale up actions, the Pacific Legislative Framework for NCDs (PLF) has been endorsed to be utilised in reforming NCD-related laws.

However, the rate of progress is not fast enough in making headway to achieving the global NCD targets. The COVID-19 pandemic and other emerging diseases, and climate change and natural disasters continued to exacerbate PICTs’ NCD burden. It is imperative to take urgent NCD actions to move towards “the healthiest Pacific”.

Pacific Heads of Health are invited to: 1) **Take active steps** to ensure that national multi-sectoral **NCD committee** is established to oversee the implementation of the national **NCD plan** and **monitor** the progress using MANA Dashboard, 2) Continue to **strengthen** NCD policies and legislation through utilisation of the PLF, 3) **Commit** to increase investment and improve capacity at **primary health care** level, and 4) **Engage** non state actors to implement innovative **behaviour change interventions** that address the root causes of NCDs.

1. BACKGROUND

The Pacific Countries and Territories (PICTs) bear a disproportionate burden from Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and are among the top 10 countries with the highest rates of diabetes in the world¹. Though largely preventable, NCDs account for around 75% of all deaths in the Pacific². Premature mortality and disability due to NCDs increase health care cost, lost workforce and reduce productivity, and pose a major threat to health and development.

To strengthen multi-sectoral responses to the NCD crisis, the Pacific leaders endorsed the Pacific NCD Roadmap². In line with WHO NCD best-buys³, the Roadmap includes five key recommended actions and other multi-sectoral interventions. The Pacific Monitoring Alliance for NCD Actions (MANA) Dashboard has been used as a mutual accountability mechanism to monitor the progress on the implementation of the Roadmap. The MANA Dashboard indicators, endorsed by the Pacific Health Ministers, are complementary to the Pacific Healthy Islands Monitoring Framework⁴, and the global NCD progress monitoring indicators and targets⁵.

This paper summarises the preliminary findings on the progress made in 2021-2022 against the status in 2019-2020⁶ as well as the baseline status in 2017-2018⁷, monitored through MANA Dashboard. The paper also covers the challenges, and future directions to scale up national NCD actions in PICTs.

2. PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

To date, of the 21 PICTs, 10 PICTs (Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, and Tuvalu) Dashboards have been updated and validated for 2021-2022 but to be endorsed by the respective Ministries of Health. The remaining 11 PICT Dashboards are still in the process of updating. The following summarises the findings on the

¹ International Diabetes Federation, IDF Atlas 2021. https://diabetesatlas.org/idfawp/resource-files/2021/07/IDF_Atlas_10th_Edition_2021.pdf

² Pacific NCD Roadmap. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/534551468332387599/pdf/893050WP0P13040PUBLIC00NCD0Roadmap.pdf>

³ Best buys and other recommended interventions for NCD. <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/259232/WHO-NMH-NVI-17-9-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

⁴ Framework of action for revitalization of healthy islands in the Pacific. [9789290616207_eng\(1\).pdf](https://www.pacificislands.org/9789290616207_eng(1).pdf)

⁵ NCD Progress Monitor 2020. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/ncd-progress-monitor-2020>

⁶ Progress on implementation of Roadmap monitored through MANA <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0272424>

⁷ Baseline status on NCD policy and legislation actions in the Pacific <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-020-08795-2>

10 PICTs updated Dashboards, however, the progress updates of the remaining PICTs are not reflected. Where relevant, cumulative progress by end of August 2022 for all 21 PICTs are also reported (See Annex 1).

Recommendation 1: Strengthen tobacco control by an incremental increase in excise duties to 70% of the retail price of cigarettes.

All 10 PICTs that have been updated for 2021-2022 have maintained their current tobacco taxation levels (except one country which has decreased) as was reported for 2019-2022 in the Pacific Heads of Health Meeting (HOH) 2021. Most PICTs have yet to reach the recommended tobacco taxation target of $\geq 70\%$. To date, 6 PICTs (American Samoa, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Palau, Tonga, and Wallis & Futuna) have reached recommended tobacco taxation target.

Recommendation 2: Increase in taxation of alcohol products.

In 2021-2022, all 10 PICTs updated Dashboards have maintained the level of alcohol taxations as was reported in HOH 2021 (except one country which increased and one country which lowered taxation level). Since MANA baseline reporting in 2018, all 21 PICTs have alcohol taxation measures in place, however, taxation levels are low and mainly based on beverage type rather than on ethanol content as recommended by the WHO NCD best-buys.

Recommendation 3: Improve policies on food and drink products directly linked to NCD, especially salt and sugary drinks.

In 2021-2022, of the 10 updated PICT Dashboards, Niue strengthened policy to reduce population salt reduction, Tonga and Fiji have put in place policy measures to restrict trans-fat in the food supply; Tonga endorsed its food based dietary guidelines; Solomon and Tuvalu developed and improved food fiscal policy; and Tokelau introduced healthy food policy in schools. Since MANA baseline reporting in 2018, 15 PICTs adopted a taxation measure to discourage unhealthy food and beverage choices; 16 PICTs put in place a plan or policy to reduce population salt consumption; and 8 PICTs now have some policy measures to restrict trans-fat in food supply; 14 PICTs endorsed food-based dietary guidelines; and 5 PICTs have enacted legislation or policies to restrict marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to

children. However, the strength of implementation is low and there are many opportunities for strengthening.

Recommendation 4: Enhance primary and secondary prevention of NCD including scaling up of WHO-PEN interventions for primary health care.

All 10 PICTs have continued to maintain the availability of the national guidelines for the diagnosis and management of at least one of the four main NCDs and a national list of essential NCD medicines. In 2021-2022, Samoa strengthened smoking cessation services; Fiji and Solomon Islands further strengthened baby friendly hospital initiative; and Tonga endorsed legislation that provides at least 12 weeks paid maternity leave to support breastfeeding. Since MANA baseline reporting in 2018, a total of 20 PICTs have national management guidelines and 18 PICTs a national essential NCD drug list. In terms of other health system response indicators progress to date; 6 PICTs have restrictions on the marketing of breast milk substitutes; 5 PICTs have at least one public hospital certified as a baby-friendly hospital; and 11 PICTs have legislations in place providing 12 weeks paid maternity leave. However, the strength of implementation is still low in many areas.

Recommendation 5: Strengthen the evidence base for better investment planning and program effectiveness.

In 2021-2022, progress in this area remains unchanged for the 10 updated PICT Dashboards, except New Caledonia collected youth population risk factor prevalence survey; Fiji collected child growth monitoring data; New Caledonia strengthened child growth monitoring; and Fiji and Solomon Islands strengthened their efforts in collecting routine case-specific mortality. Since MANA baseline reporting in 2018, 17 PICTs have completed adult NCD risk prevalence data and 18 PICTs monitored adolescent prevalence data over the past 5-10 years; 20 PICTs have systems for generating cause-specific mortality data; and 16 PICTs routinely collect child growth data. Some PICTs, including Fiji, Tonga, Nauru, Palau, and Kiribati, have undertaken one of the following tax impact assessments including tobacco, alcohol, sugar-sweetened beverages, and other discretionary foods, and fruits and vegetables. Many of these assessments found that increasing taxes resulted in increased price of product at point-of-

sale, increased government revenue, and decreased import quantities. However more Pacific evidence is required for better planning and decision makings.

Others

a) Leadership and governance

Progress on the implementation of leadership and governance area remains the same in 2021-2022, except Kiribati that has strengthened national NCD strategies, while some national strategic plans were expired and in the process of developing new strategies. Overall, since MANA baseline reporting in 2008 for all 21 PICTs, 12 PICTs have over the past four years established a multi-sectoral NCD taskforce to oversee the implementation of their national NCD plan, however this needs strengthening as many established are not fully functioning. 17 PICTs have developed a national multi-sectoral NCD strategy.

b) Preventive policies

Of the 10 PICT Dashboards updated for 2021-2022, Samoa and Solomon Islands strengthened polices on smoke free environment; Kiribati and Solomon Islands strengthened for tobacco health warning; Samoa and Solomon Islands for tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship; Fiji for tobacco sales and licencing; and Samoa for drink driving. The progress on the implementation of other preventive policies remains the same in 2021-2022. Since MANA baseline reporting in 2018 for all 21 PICTs, 20 PICTs have regulations in place to control drink driving, 8 PICTs restrict alcohol advertising but need strengthening, 21 PICTs has licenses to restrict sales of alcohol.

Fiji and Tuvalu introduced compulsory physical education in school, while New Caledonia further strengthened on it. Fiji and Samoa further strengthened enforcement of law and regulations related to NCDs. Since the MANA baseline reporting, 17 PICTs have compulsory physical education in school.

c) Pacific Legislative Framework

The Pacific Legislative Framework for NCDs has been endorsed by the Pacific Health Ministers Meeting in March 2022. The Ministers committed to utilise the Framework in reforming NCD-related laws to accelerate actions on NCD to meet global NCD targets and regional commitments.

3. CHALLENGES

Some progress has been observed in most PICTs; however, the rate of progress is not fast enough in making headway to achieving the global NCD targets. ***The COVID-19 pandemic and other emerging diseases, climate change and natural disasters*** are exacerbating PICTs' NCD burden through the disruption of essential health care services, as well as delays in the implementation of NCD related policies, legislation, and programs.

Despite the pandemic brings to light the need for ***decentralisation of NCD services***, there is still insufficient investment to improve availability of essential medicines, equipment, and staffing at the primary health care level for the prevention, early detection, and management of NCDs. Significant opportunities exist to address ***cross cutting issues***, however, there is still a lack of capacity and priority to address the interrelationship of communicable diseases and NCDs in a holistic, comprehensive, and integrated approach in most PICTs.

Unhealthy environment, socioeconomic factor, and behavioural practices affect the whole Pacific population and leading to unhealthy behaviours such as physical inactivity, consuming less healthy foods and drinks, tobacco use, and alcohol abuse. Strengthening policies and legislation on NCDs, particularly fiscal policies on unhealthy products, preventing tobacco industry interference, restricting trans-fats in the food supply, and restricting marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children continued to be a significant challenge in PICTs due to the limitation of capacity and capability to develop, enact and enforce relevant laws and regulations.

Despite commitments made at high political level, there has been a significant challenge in ***governance, planning, inter-ministerial collaboration*** and ***engaging non-health*** sectors

including churches, youth, and civil societies to address NCDs in a sustained ‘whole of government and whole of society approach’. There is a significant need to leveraging opportunities to **advocate for NCD multi-sectoral actions** at relevant national stakeholder’s forum by highlighting gaps identified on MANA dashboard to strengthen actions through the implementation of the endorsed PLF in reforming NCD related laws and regulations across all relevant sectors.

Without **stronger commitment, additional investment, and scaling up actions** on NCDs, PICTs will remain off-track to achieving global NCD targets, continue to threaten socioeconomic development, and hinder to achieving Healthy Island Visions and Sustainable Development Goals.

4. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In recognising the gravity of the Pacific NCD Crisis, it is imperative to regain or strengthen the momentum for NCD prevention and control actions. There are several opportunities to strengthen NCD actions, expand partnerships and engage various sectors and communities to leapfrog and move towards “the healthiest Pacific’. Scaling up actions on the Pacific NCD Roadmap will ensure the prevention and control of NCDs, minimise co-morbidity due to emerging infectious diseases, and promote the well-being of people to achieve our vision of ‘Pacific people live long, healthy, and productive lives’.

4.1 Recommendations for governments:

Pacific Heads of Heath are invited to:

- 1) **Take active steps** to ensure that functioning national **multi-sectoral NCD committee** is established to oversee the implementation of the **costed national NCD plan** with specific targets and monitor the progress using **mutual accountability mechanism** such as the Pacific MANA Dashboard or similar indicators to ensure progress towards global NCD targets,
- 2) **Continue to strengthen** NCD related **policies and legislation**, from development to implementation through inter-ministerial collaboration and utilisation of the endorsed Pacific Legislative Framework for NCDs, particularly in addressing common gaps in the

region such as increasing taxes for unhealthy products to the recommended level, preventing tobacco industry interference, regulating alcohol marketing, restricting trans-fats in the food supply, and restricting marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children,

- 3) **Advocate for and commit** to increase investment and improve capacity at **primary health care level** to enhance early detection, management of NCDs and mental wellbeing, and approaches that address the communicable diseases and NCDs cross cutting issues in a holistic, comprehensive, and integrated approach, and
- 4) **Engage** civil societies, schools, workplaces, churches, youth, and communities to implement and enhance **innovative behaviour change interventions** targeting key NCD risk factors and associated environmental and socio-economic determinants that address the root causes of NCDs in a coordinated whole of government and society approach.

4.2 Recommendations for development partners:

Development partners are invited to:

- 1) **Increase commitment** in providing technical support to scale up NCD actions and cross cutting issues in PICTs, and monitoring the progress of implementation,
- 2) **Invest** additional financial resources to implement innovative evidence based NCD interventions using creative ways of communication to enhance behaviour change,
- 3) **Support countries to** plan and undertake impact assessment e.g., taxation and other policies, and share information on evidence based best practices in the Pacific.
- 4) **Facilitate** in strengthening efforts to engage civil societies, and to improve regional and international collaboration, and networking opportunities.